

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 AMMAN 02621 01 OF 02 201345Z

51

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

----- 097622

O 201255Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4423

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 AMMAN 2621

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, CB, JO

SUBJECT: CAMBODIAN REQUEST FOR POLITICAL ASYLUM - EMBASSY
COUNSELLOR LEK CHHAN

REF: (A) STATE 084161; (B) STATE 090532

1. SUMMARY: COUNSELLOR KHMER REPUBLIC EMBASSY
IN JORDAN LEK CHHAN REQUESTS POLITICAL ASYLUM
IN U.S. FOR HIMSELF, WIFE, FOUR CHILDREN AND GRANDSON,
ALL RESIDENT IN JORDAN. ASYLUM REQUEST ON GROUNDS CHHAN
AND FAMILY OPPOSE COMMUNISM AND FEAR PERSECUTION ON
RETURN AS RESULT CHHAN'S KNOWN OPPOSITION TO PRES. SIHANOUK
BECAUSE OF 1970 PRAGUE EMBASSY INCIDENT AND TO COMMUNISM BECAUSE
OF REFUSAL TO ACCEPT 1974 SOVIET OFFER IN NEW DELHI
TO RECRUIT HIM FOR INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITY. CHHAN SAYS HIS APPROACH
TO EMBASSY WILL REMAIN SECRET, BUT HE CAN REMAIN TEMPORARILY
IN PLACE AND HAS NO IMMEDIATE NEED OF FUNDS. HE HAS A SON
STUDYING IN THE U.S. HE SAYS U.S. IS BY FAR
HIS PREFERRED CHOICE OF ASYLUM, AND DOES NOT WISH TO
REMAIN IN JORDAN OR GO TO FRANCE. HE APPEARS CALM
BUT AWAITS RESPONSE TO HIS REQUEST. END SUMMARY.

2. LEK CHHAN, COUNSELLOR KHMER REPUBLIC EMBASSY IN
JORDAN CALLED ON DCM AT U.S. EMBASSY ON APRIL 20. CHHAN IS
WELL KNOWN TO EMBASSY SINCE HE PERSONALLY ESTABLISHED KHMER
EMBASSY HERE AS FIRST CHARGE D'AFFAIRES IN AUTUMN
1974 FOLLOWING GOJ-KHMER DECISION TO ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 AMMAN 02621 01 OF 02 201345Z

RELATIONS DURING PREMIER LON BORET'S AUG. 1974 VISIT HERE.

OUR EMBASSY FACILITATED INITIAL CONTACT BETWEEN GOJ AND KHMER REPUBLIC AND PROVIDED INFORMAL ASSISTANCE TO CHHAN IN SETTING UP EMBASSY ESTABLISHED HERE.

3. IMMEDIATELY UPON ARRIVAL CHHAN SAID HE FORMALLY REQUESTS POLITICAL ASYLUM IN THE UNITED STATES FOR HIMSELF AND HIS WIFE, THREE DAUGHTERS (AGES 14, 12 AND 9) AND GRANDSON, AGE 21. (FULL BIO DETAILS FOR LEK CHHAN AND FAMILY BY SEPTTEL.) CHHAN SAID HE HATES COMMUNISM AND CANNOT LIVE UNDER SUCH A REGIME. DURING 1 1/2 HOUR INTERVIEW LEK CHHAN RECOUNTED SEVERAL INSTANCES OF HIS OPPOSITION TO COMMUNISTS AND TO SIHANOUK WHICH HE FELT WOULD MAKE IT PROBABLE HE WOULD FACE PERSECUTION IF HE RETURNED TO CAMBODIA. MOST SALIENT BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS ARE AS FOLLOWS: HE WAS BORN IN 1921, RECEIVED DIPLOMA FOR LYCEE SISOVATU IN PHNOM PENH IN 1942; SINCE 1950 HE IN MINISTRY FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SERVING IN SAIGON, RANGOON, PHNOM PENH, PRAGUE, NEW DELHI AND NOW IN AMMAN. HE HAS SERVED AS PRIVATE SECRETARY IN 1970-71 TO FOREIGN MINISTER SE SON NGOC THANH. HE HAS RECEIVED THREE CAMBODIAN DECORATIONS.

4. HE RECOUNTED TWO INCIDENTS WHICH HE SAID MAKE HIM ANATHEMA TO CURRENT REGIME. FIRST, HE SIDED WITH KHMER AMBASSADOR IN PRAGUE IN RESISTING 1970 ATTEMPT BY STUDENT PARTISANS FOR DEPOSED PRESIDENT SIHANOUK TO SEIZE KHMER EMBASSY. STUDENTS MOMENTARILY SEIZED EMBASSY AND LEK CHHAN FOLLOWED, KHMER AMBASSADOR WHO LOYAL TO LON NOL GOVERNMENT, AGAINST THEM. AS RESULT OF HIS DEMONSTRATION OF LOYALTY, HE WAS REWARDED WITH PRIVATE SECRETARY POST TO FOREIGN MINISTER SE SON NGOC THANH.

5. SECOND INCIDENT OCCURED ON POSTING IN NEW DELHI IN FEBRUARY 1974, WHEN SOVIET SECOND SECRETARY YANOV (LAST NAME) ATTEMPTED TO RECRUIT HIM TO PROVIDE INTELLIGENCE CONCERNING KHMER REPUBLIC AFFAIRS AND, STATING THAT LON NOL GOVERNMENT ONLY HAD ONE OR TWO YEARS LEFT, "OFFERED HIM "AMBASSADORSHIP IN SUCCESSOR

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 AMMAN 02621 01 OF 02 201345Z

GOVERNMENT IN RETURN FOR HIS COOPERATION. LEK CHHAN SAYS HE REFUSED, REPORTED INCIDENT TO HIS GOVERNMENT AND PERSONALLY RECOUNTED EVENT TO KHMER PRESIDENT LON NOL AND PREMIER LON BORET. HE SAYS HE THEN GIVEN 1974 ASSIGNMENT TO OPEN EMBASSY IN JORDAN AS REWARD FOR LOYALTY. HE ALSO FEARED COMMUNIST REPRISAL BECAUSE SOVIET RECRUITER YANOV WAS RECALLED TO MOSCOW IMMEDIATELY AFTER INCIDENT.

6. LEK CHHAN'S PRIMARY EMPHASIS WAS ON HIS HATRED OF COMMUNISM AND ITS DECTATORIAL MEANS. HE SAID COMMUNISTS HAVE ALREADY DESTROYED HIS FATHER'S HOUSE IN NORTHERN PROVINCE AND THAT THE FEARS HE WOULD FACE IMPRISONMENT UPON RETURN. WORST THAN THAT, HE LIVES IN FEAR OF A REGIME THAT DOES NOT RESPECT HUMAN RIGHTS. "A KNOCK ON THE DOOR SOME NIGHT WOULD BE ENOUGH TO END ONE'S LIBERTY AND A PERSON CANNOT THROW AWAY A BOWL OF RICE WITHOUT RISKING PUNISHMENT."

7. REGARDING HIS CURRENT SITUATION, LEK CHHAN ASSESSED THAT HE CAN REMAIN IN JORDAN FOR A FEW WEEKS. HE TOLD HIS AMBASSADOR (HONG HOEUNG DOEUNG, ALSO WELL-KNOWN TO EMBASSY AND WITH CHILDREN IN AMERICAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL) HE WOULD FOLLOW TO ANY EMBASSY OVERSEAS BUT WOULD NOT RETURN TO CAMBODIA UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES. (AMBASSADOR DOES NOT KNOW OF HIS APPROACH TO US HOWEVER.) HE SAID AMBASSADOR BELIEVES NEW REGIME WILL LEAVE EMBASSY IN STATUS QUO FOR NEXT TWO OR THREE MONTHS WHILE CONSOLIDATING SITUATION IN CAMBODIA. EMBASSY SOUNDS IN FAIR FINANCIAL CONDITION, HAS ENOUGH FUNDS TO MEET UPCOMING PAYROLL AND ADVANCE RENTAL OF SEVERAL MONTHS PAID ON MOST EMBASSY HOUSES.

8. HE SAID JORDANIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY DIRECTOR OF POLITICAL AFFAIRS HAS ASSURED KHMER EMBASSY THAT, DESPITE APRIL 18 GOJ IMPLIED RECOGNITION OF SIHANOUK GOVERNMENT (AMMAN 2592), EMBASSY STAFF FREE REMAIN IN JORDAN ON BUSINESS AS USUAL BASIS FOR IMMEDIATE FUTURE OR IF THEY WISH, TO LEAVE COUNTRY. LEK CHHAN SAID QUESTION OF POSSIBLE POLITICAL ASYLUM IN JORDAN DID NOT COME UP SINCE HE MADE NO SUCH DEMAND. IN ANY CASE, HE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 AMMAN 02621 01 OF 02 201345Z

SAID HE COULD NOT STAY IN JORDAN SINCE HE DOES NOT KNOW ARABIC AND COULD NOT CONCEIVE OF FINDING GAINFUL EMPLOYMENT. IN EXPLAINING OTHER POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVES TO US, HE SAID (DESPITE HIS KNOWLEDGE OF FRENCH), HE WOULD NOT WISH ASYLUM IN FRANCE BECUASE HE FEARS REPRISAL FROM PRO-SIHANOUK ELEMENTS, CITING AS EVIDENCE APRIL 19 RADIO NEWS THAT KHMER LOYALIST SOSTHENE FERNZNDEZ WAS CAPTURED BY SIHANOUK ELEMENTS IN PARIS.

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 AMMAN 02621 02 OF 02 201354Z

51

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W

----- 097643

O 201255Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4424

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 AMMAN 2621

EXDIS

9. LEK CHHAN INDICATED US IS BY FAR HIS PREFERRED CHOICE OF ASYLUM. ALTHOUGH HIS ENGLISH IS WEAK, HE SAID HE FELT U.S. OFFERS BEST OPPORTUNITY FOR EMPLOYMENT AND THAT HE WOULD WORK AS A TRUCK OR TAXI DRIVER IF NECESSARY. HIS 24 YEAR OLD SON, IN WASHINGTON SINCE MAY 1974, IS STUDYING AT AN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE INSTITUTE PRIOR TO POSSIBLE UNIVERSITY TRAINING. (HE PROMISED TO FURNISH FURTHER DETAILS REGARDING INSTITUTE'S LOCATION, ETC.). HIS 21 YEAR OLD GRAND-SON SAM SEREY, ON WHOSE BEHALF HE ALSO REQUESTING ASYLUM, HOLDS DOUBLE BACCALAUREATE AND DESIRES CONTINUE STUDIES IN US. HE SAID HIS WIFE'S ENGLISH IS BETTER THAN HIS (HE SPEAKS FAIR FRENCH BUT POOR ENGLISH) AND HIS THREE DAUGHTERS SPEAK EXCELLENT ENGLISH. (THEY ARE WELL KNOWN TO US SINCE THEY ATTEND AMMAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY SCHOOL WHERE EMBASSY DEPENDENTS ARE ENROLLED).

10. DCM INFORMED LEK CHHAN THAT HE WOULD FORWARD HIS REQUEST FOR POLITICAL ASYLUM TO USG BUT COULD MAKE NO COMMITMENT IN ITS REGARD. PER INSTRUCTIONS PARA 2 REFTEL A, HE DOUBLE CHECKED TO MAKE CERTAIN LEK CHHAN CAPABLE OF REMAINING IN JORDAN TEMPORARILY, AND THAT HE IN NO DANGER OF FORCIBLE RETURN TO CAMBODIA, OR IN FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES. DCM STATED THAT HE WOULD FORWARD REQUEST TO WASHINGTON AND WOULD INFORM HIM OF RESPONSE. LEK CHHAN STATED HE WISHES TO KEEP HIS REQUEST FOR ASYLUM CONFIDENTIAL FOR THE MOMENT, PARTICULARLY FROM KHMER AMBASSADOR, AND HIS WIFE UNDER-CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 AMMAN 02621 02 OF 02 201354Z

STANDS THIS ALSO. HE SAID THAT, DESPITE HIS WIFE'S URGINGS, HE HELD OFF MAKING THIS REQUEST UNTIL HE HEARD ON RADIO YESTERDAY THAT NEW REGIME HAS ARRESTED 40 MEMBERS OF LON NOL GOVERNMENT. HE SAID THAT ONLY OTHER CAMBODIANS HERE ARE AMBASSADOR AND ONE ATTACHE AND THEIR FAMILIES. HE NOT SURE WHAT THEIR ULTIMATE PLANS WILL BE, BUT THAT AMBASSADOR IS SITTING TIGHT UNTIL HE SEES HOW SITUATION EVOLVES.

1. COMMENT: WE HAVE NO BASIS TO DOUBT THE DRAMATIC EVIDENCE HE ADDUCED TO PROVE THAT HIS PAST RECORD OF ASSOCIATION WITH KHMER REPUBLIC MIGHT WELL FORCE HIM TO FACE DEATH OR PERSECUTION AT HANDS OF CUMMUNISTS.

12. WHILE WE ATTEMPTED TO DRAW OUT LEK CHHAN REGARDING OTHER POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE COUNTRIES FOR ASYLUM AND INDICATED THAT UNHCR (WHICH HAS NO OFFICE IN JORDAN) ALSO INVOLVED IN THIS COMPLEX PROBLEM, HE APPEARS FORESEE NO OTHER FEASIBLE COURSE THAN ASYLUM IN US AT PRESENT. WHILE WE RECOGNIZE THAT GOJ AS HOST GOVERNMENT HAS PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY HANDLING SUCH ASYLUM REQUESTS (STATE A-9999 OF OCTOBER 5, 1972), JORDAN'S MEANS TO PROVIDE SOLUTION SATISFACTORY TO LEK CHHAN ARE OBVIOUSLY MEAGER. SITUATION ALSO COMPLICATED BY FACT THAT USG ACTIVELY ENCOURAGED GOJ TO ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH KHMER REPUBLIC AND GOJ OBVIOUSLY FEELS WE ARE FAR MORE INTIMATELY CONNECTED TO CURRENT SITUATION IN CAMBODIA. UNLESS DEPARTMENT SO ADVISES, WE DO NOT INTEND TO CONTACT JORDANIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY AT THIS POINT TO ARRANGE EXTENSION OF STAY FOR LEK CHHAN, SINCE HIS REMARKS IN PAR 8 ABOVE INDICATED GOJ HAS ALREADY OFFERED EXTENSION AND HE APPEARS IN NO IMMEDIATE NEED FOR DANGER. SUCH A REQUEST COULD BECOME KNOWN AND MIGHT CONCEIVABLY TRIGGER SOME ACTION AGAINST LEK CHHAN FROM KHMER EMBASSY STAFF. WE BELIVE LEK CHHAN WILL WAIT PATIENTLY FOR ANOTHER FEW DAYS BUT WILL THEN BEGIN TO PRESS FOR ANSWER TO HIS REQUEST.

13. ACTION REQUESTED: WE SUSPECT DEPARTMENT ALREADY HEAVILY BURDENED WITH SUCH REQUESTS BUT REQUEST YOU PROVIDE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 AMMAN 02621 02 OF 02 201354Z

US WITH GUIDANCE FOR AT LEAST INTERIM RESPONSE IN NEXT FEW DAYS INCLUDING GUIDANCE AS TO HOW TO HANDLE WITH GOJ FOREIGN MINISTRY.
FYI: BASED ON ABOVE INFO, LEK CHHAN DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE ELIGIBLE FOR AN IMMIGRANT VISA IN A PREFERENCE STATUS AND WE SEE NO POSSIBILITY FOR HIS QUALIFYING IN A NON-PREFERENCE STATUS.

PICKERING

CONFIDENTIAL

NNN

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL ASYLUM, DIPLOMATIC PERSONNEL
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 APR 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975AMMAN02621
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750138-0809
From: AMMAN
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750433/aaaaberq.tel
Line Count: 278
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 75 STATE 084161, 75 STATE 090532
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 09 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <09 MAY 2003 by CunninFX>; APPROVED <12 MAY 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: CAMBODIAN REQUEST FOR POLITICAL ASYLUM - EMBASSY COUNSELLOR LEK CHHAN
TAGS: SREF, CB, JO, US, (CHHAN, LEK)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006